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on Tuesday, 5 November 1991, at 10 a.m.

President:	Mr. SHIHABI	(Saudi Arabia)
later:	Mr. MIN (Vice-President)	(Myanmar)

- Organization of work
- Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations: report of the Secretary-General (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The PRESIDENT: I should like to inform members that, with a view to seeking agreement on the texts of draft resolutions, open-ended, informal consultations will be held on agenda item 137, "Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields", and on agenda item 143, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations". The times and places for these consultations, which all interested delegations are invited to attend, will be announced in the Journal.

AGENDA ITEM 143 (continued)

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/46/568)

Mr. FORTIER (Canada) (interpretation from French): In 1987, the Canadian Government published a pamphlet with the title "Sharing Our Future" setting out our new strategy for international development assistance. The strategy outlined clearly the main pillars of our future activities in this area: alleviating poverty; developing human resources; modernizing economies; increasing the participation of women; reconciling development and environmental concerns; and meeting basic food and energy needs.

The strategy strongly emphasized the need for Canada to build, world wide, partnerships with the various bodies and organizations which are providing international development leadership. The development network within the United Nations is one of our principal partners, given its global reach and the priority it accords to the needs and aspirations of the developing countries.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

In our view, effective development assistance should promote lasting, self-sustaining development. However, it is regrettable but true that, in many parts of the world, the development process has often been interrupted by disasters of natural or human origin. When a disaster occurs, a speedy and well coordinated response is of paramount importance, not only to alleviate the victims' suffering but also to minimize the adverse effects of the disaster on the development process. The Canadian Government therefore believes that effective disaster relief is a critical part of development assistance, because disasters hit developing countries harder and hinder the ongoing development process.

In the statement she gave from this rostrum in September, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Barbara McDougall, stated that:

> "Assistance to victims of natural, economic and political disasters has always been a priority of the United Nations. Yet we are well aware that the United Nations response to these crises has lost its edge, dulled by quarrels among agencies and jealous hoarding of admittedly scant resources". (A/46/PV.9, p. 58)

She therefore recommended that action should be taken without delay to solve these serious problems, which is why, among other reasons, we are here today.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

(spoke in English)

No single United Nations role or activity is more important to Canadians than the Organization's responsibility in leading the international community in the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance the world over. Emergency humanitarian assistance is a cornerstone of the Canadian development assistance programme, and we consider its effective delivery to be one of the highest priorities of the United Nations. In this year alone, we have been involved actively and deeply in three large relief efforts led by the United Nations in Iraq, Bangladesh and the Horn of Africa.

Canadians have a long tradition of providing humanitarian assistance through a variety of non-governmental organizations, such as the Red Cross, church organizations, CARE Canada and many others. The Canadian Government has been an emergency-aid donor through the United Nations since its inception. Since those early days, the efficiency of such international assistance has been enhanced dramatically. Emergency supplies can now be shipped in hours and can reach around the globe in less than a day.

Telecommunications have vastly improved our understanding of emergencies and have accelerated both the call for help and the mobilization of assistance. The number of agencies available to provide assistance, both governmental and non-governmental, has also increased significantly. Many members of the Organization's own family of agencies have also developed capacities to assist in this field. While they have developed their own programmes of emergency assistance with rare skill and effectiveness, adequate coordination among them has often been lacking, and this has of late presented all of us with a major challenge.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

Over the years, different types of emergencies have given rise to the creation of new organizations, such as the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), and the intense involvement of existing organizations, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The agencies have been called on to respond to a wide range of emergencies arising from natural man-made causes, with many combining the features of both. In an emergency situation, they, along with other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), all contribute to mitigating the effects of disasters. Necessarily there is a time-lag, while ad hoc arrangements are made, before assistance begins arriving for those in need. That time-lag is what we need to reduce.

Therefore Canada endorses the thoughtful and far-reaching report of the Secretary-General on humanitarian assistance. That report addresses many of Canada's concerns and provides useful recommendations for achieving our collective goal of enhancing existing capacities within the United Nations system and for ensuring a rapid and effective United Nations response to emergencies.

One of the most important proposals arising from the report is the creation of a high-level position within the United Nations system responsible for coordinating the efforts of the various United Nations, non-United Nations and non-governmental-organization agencies, as well as donor and recipient nations. Such a coordinator has been appointed in the past to lead the Special Emergency Programme for the Horn of Africa (SEPHA). The early success

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

of SEPHA, building on the significant achievements of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, led in the mid-1980s by Bradford Morse and Maurice Strong, has provided us with an indication of what a coordinator could do on a global scale. In addition, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan has discharged his responsibilities as Executive Delegate of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Humanitarian Programme for Iraq, Kuwait and the Iran-Iraq and Iraq-Turkey border areas with exemplary dedication and effectiveness, providing convincing evidence that the quality of leadership is a key factor in humanitarian coordination.

To be effective, any such coordinator must, in the opinion of my Government, have direct access to and the full support of the Secretary-General. The coordinator would need to be selected carefully to ensure that he or she possesses the personal qualities and professional experience necessary to generate coordination among agencies of diverse mandates and traditionally varied approaches. A special position need not necessarily be created; it may well be that the responsibilities of an existing position can be adjusted to encompass these functions. The report refers to a high-level coordinator with a secretariat in New York. We understand the rationale for that recommendation. However, the location of the coordinator's staff and his or her exact place within the Secretariat's structure matter less than the emphasis on a strong, direct link with the Secretary-General, as well as operational links with all major players, be they headquartered in New York, Geneva, Rome or Vienna.

The United Nations plays a unique role in disaster relief. It provides leadership to non-governmental organizations, to donors and to affected countries, as well as to its own agencies. For that reason, we support the

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

creation of an inter-agency coordination committee, led by the United Nations coordinator, which will enhance communications during individual emergencies and an understanding of those emergencies and will define areas of responsibility not only among the various United Nations agencies involved in humanitarian assistance but also among the many other international actors involved.

In order to facilitate a rapid response to emergency situations, the coordinator will require an enhanced early warning system, close consultations with the agencies involved in humanitarian assistance, and a fund which can be used for immediate response until contributions are received following a joint appeal from the United Nations agencies involved.

It is true that many emergency situations cannot be predicted. However, advance warning is possible for many others, such as floods, drought and some refugee situations. Still others are recurring. We support the Secretary-General's recommendation for a systematic pooling and analysis of information from existing early warning systems within the United Nations, as well as from Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. We agree fully that, since disasters have both natural and human causes, an effective early warning system requires information on all relevant factors leading to such problems.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

Canada is pleased to note the emphasis that the Secretary-General, in his report, places on the importance of coherent and rapid responses on the basis of an agreed framework for the division of responsibilities between organizations in the United Nations system. Such a clear definition of responsibilities at the level of agency headquarters should be mirrored by steps at the field level, including the designation of a single United Nations official responsible for field coordination - usually the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative, who is statutorily also the UNDRO representative. These field-level officials should be provided with significant delegated authority, including authority with regard to pre-authorized spending levels and enhanced training in disaster management. We believe that the importance of a smooth, rapid and predictable reaction to disasters cannot be overemphasized. We do not exclude recognition of the occasional need for field coordinators appointed in an ad hoc fashion on the basis of particular skills called for by the nature of the emergency. However, such ad hoc measures should represent the exception rather than the rule.

We encourage further work on arrangements for pre-authorized spending, for the recruitment and loan, within the United Nations, of emergency staff, and for rapid procurement and deployment of relief supplies, perhaps through standing offers or access to existing emergency stockpiles. Prepositioning of essential supplies will remain critical. Emphasis should be given to helping disaster-prone countries to negotiate with neighbouring countries for immediate access to essential supplies and equipment. As well, we support calls for an international roster of disaster-management expertise, to which the coordinator could have rapid and automatic access. The coordinator will

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

require enhanced technical support, including an operations centre solely for humanitarian purposes. He will require also a management-information system and a centralized emergency-training programme on disaster management - and here I should note the important work already done by UNDRO and UNDP in the training field.

We are pleased that the Secretary-General has stressed the importance of consolidated appeals and of the availability of finance for rapid responses. While it is true that many agencies have funds to begin work until donors respond to appeals, these funds are simply not adequate to meet the needs generated by large-scale emergencies. This is why we endorse fully the Secretary-General's recommendation that a $50-million fund be created, to be replenished by the funds raised through a joint appeal under the coordinator's authority. There are good arguments for the creation of this fund, either through assessments or through voluntary contributions. Canada will support whichever method of financing is likely to lead most rapidly to the establishment of the fund once a coordinator has been appointed.

In the same way, we recognize that individual agencies have been very successful in meeting their assistance goals through individual appeals. However, the appeals sometimes overlap, and it is often difficult to determine their status, and this leads to delays on the part of donors. Therefore, Canada supports the idea of consolidated appeals to simplify and speed up the donation process. Our goal is to ensure effective, rapid responses to humanitarian emergencies. The proposed reforms will not only achieve this goal but also lead to a more streamlined system, which should ensure rapid donor responses to appeals.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

The primary responsibility for disaster prevention and relief lies with the country affected. All countries wish to assist their peoples, but sometimes, for a variety of reasons, this is difficult. However, the strengthening of response mechanisms in disaster-prone areas should be a priority for all Governments, which should reinforce their own central role in emergency response. Disaster-management training will need to be given higher priority and donor support, as will programmes aimed at disaster reduction, mitigation and preparedness.

We welcome the proposed increased use of free zones or corridors of tranquillity so that agencies can reach those in need, even in times of political crisis. We look forward to further innovations of this type that reflect the duty of the international community and of all Member States to assist those in need.

We do not see proposals for reform of the United Nations humanitarian-assistance machinery as affecting or undermining in any way the sovereignty of United Nations Member States. Indeed, such sovereignty, of equal interest to us all, is guaranteed in the Charter, as well as under international law. Rather, we are seeking urgently required practical improvements in relief procedures, which are critical to all Member States - donors and recipients alike. Need I recall that any of our countries can be struck by emergencies?

(spoke in French)

Finally, when a large-scale disaster is unfolding, adequate communications strategies are essential. The thoughts of our populations go out to those in need, and the Member States want to know how the United Nations is leading international relief efforts. While, in recent years, the

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

United Nations has taken significant and praiseworthy strides in developing more sophisticated and effective media relations, further improvements in this area at times of humanitarian crisis remain possible and necessary. Indeed, the media's role during such crises is vital, as they - and only they - can mobilize the public concern and resources necessary to supplement our own efforts. As well, only the media can let our populations know of the superb work accomplished by United Nations emergency-relief personnel.

In conclusion - and to return to the theme of my opening remarks - I wish to make the point that it is important to recall that many disasters have root causes related to poverty, environmental degradation, human-rights violations and inadequate economic development. The course of a natural disaster is affected also by the level of development of the area concerned. Disaster relief is only one element of the multi-stage continuum of preparedness, relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. We believe that preparations for, and the first response to, an emergency situation require a coordinator. By managing a well-organized relief effort, he or she could also begin the important work of rehabilitation and, ultimately, of resuming the development process as quickly as possible.

Mr. SINGH (India): I wish to address an issue that not only is very important but also, in the United Nations, has drawn noticeable attention and comment. The Secretary-General's report (A/46/568) is a useful compendium, and the Director-General for International Economic Cooperation, in his statement to the Second Committee on humanitarian assistance, dwelt on a couple of very important aspects of this matter. I should like to thank the Secretary-General and the Director-General for their valuable input into our debate on the subject. I should like to thank also Ambassador Eliasson of

(Mr. Singh, India)

Sweden for his excellent summary of the discussion in the Economic and Social Council.

Developing countries like mine - regularly prey to natural disasters, and with resources often insufficient to cope with the enormous challenges posed by such disasters - are well aware of the importance of international solidarity and action in this sphere.

(Mr. Singh, India)

The increasing media attention given to emergency situations, the increasing frequency of such events, the increasing demands made on the international community and the increasing impression that coordination of United Nations response can be improved have been some of the considerations which have led to this important initiative of some delegations. My delegation appreciates these compulsions. However, desired results can be ensured with a detailed examination, study and understanding of the lacunae in the present arrangements. At present, the United Nations system, tested in the field and with a vast repository of information on it, has various bodies that respond, each in its own fashion, to natural disasters. The response is quick and generous, but could at the same time benefit from enhanced focus. This is where a coordinated response could enhance the multilateral effort in addressing such emergencies.

Over the years, the United Nations system, as I said, has built up expertise in response to the challenges as they arise. Such expertise is available in a wide range of organizations, from the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development and the Commission on Human Settlements to the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme. These bodies, within well-defined mandates, have done excellent work.

Reform and restructuring have become popular prescriptions nowadays in the United Nations. The concept of coordination and harmonization comes up repeatedly in discussions on these subjects. It appears that the problems are not unique to humanitarian assistance but endemic to the fragmented way in

(Mr. Singh, India)

which the United Nations structures have evolved over the years. The administrative correctives for enhancing coordination exist, and many of these are in the Secretary-General's report (A/46/568). Many of these aspects are best left to the administrative wisdom, authority and prerogative of the Secretary-General himself. I should like to comment on various important aspects of the debate as perceived by India. These issues came up in this year's summer session of the Economic and Social Council and elicited proposals whose importance warrants their being squarely addressed.

The need for the better application of the expertise and resources available within the United Nations system is evident. And application, in my view, has two aspects: the short- to medium-term, and the long-term. Short-term application tends to address the visible manifestations of the crisis; a symptomatic approach as it were. But there is the deeper and larger context as well, brought out vividly in the statement to the Second Committee of the Director-General for International Economic Cooperation. Let me quote an important conclusion of his:

> "Emergency assistance needs to be provided in ways which will be directly supportive of recovery and long-term development."

In other words, the United Nations system's vast knowledge and resources relating to humanitarian assistance need to be put at the service of development so that addressing emergencies is not merely a reactive exercise but one that goes to the heart of the matter.

The second question relates to the mechanics of addressing crisis situations brought about by natural disasters: an approach being propagated is what has come to be known as "humanitarian intervention", that is to say, the right of the international community to intervene in a country where such

(Mr. Singh, India)

a crisis situation exists and demands drastic action. This is a concept fraught with serious implications, and raises several fundamental questions. For example, who is going to decide on the gravity of the situation, the country that suffers from it or someone outside? Who is going to determine what is best needed for that country's problems - the country itself or outside agencies? What kind of "intervention" is being considered? How will the intervening authority ensure proper functioning within the country concerned if the decision to intervene is a unilateral one by that authority? There are other questions, but I have touched on only a few uncertainties to illustrate the complexity of the matter.

These are delicate, difficult and sensitive questions that cannot be dismissed on the argument that crises demand innovative solutions. Innovation at the expense of a nation's sovereignty, or innovation calling for a reluctant abridgement of such sovereignty, must be strictly avoided. The Charter of the United Nations stresses the domestic jurisdiction of States; nobody can or should dilute this aspect of national sovereignty, even if the stakes are high. What benefit would the United Nations have if, in applying the concept of involuntary intervention for humanitarian purposes, it met the resistance of the host country concerned and worsened the very humanitarian situation it wished to tackle?

The General Assembly last year adopted an important resolution - resolution 45/100 - which reaffirmed the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States and which recognized the primary task of each State in initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within their respective territories. These sentiments must be honoured and restressed in the outcome of consultations on this

(Mr. Singh, India)

plenary item. The importance of the affected State initiating action implies that the coordinating mechanism must come into operation only at the request of the affected Member State. Such a request has implicit in it the consent of the State making it.

The proposals on early warning and prevention are an associated concern. On early warning, the United Nations and its organizations already have a number of systems and databases, whether it be the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Emergency Alert System, the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Earthwatch Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) Early Warning System, the World Weather Watch, or the Office for Research and the Collection of Information. These bodies have clear humanitarian mandates. To broaden these early warning systems to include information on areas such as political developments and integrate them into the decision-making process in the United Nations would raise various kinds of controversies. If the idea is to integrate the existing mechanisms on early warning, this is once again an administrative corrective action, part of overall coordination. I am not suggesting that the socio-political aspect is unimportant; on the contrary, it is important enough for international organizations not to meddle in, because that would only complicate matters.

I should like to refer here to a specific proposal that has come up for consideration: my delegation has noted the proposal to appoint a high-level coordinator for humanitarian assistance, to be located in New York and to report directly to the Secretary-General. As I explained earlier, improved coordination is a laudable objective, but the mandate and operational prerogative and authority of a high-level coordinator, given the complexities

(Mr. Singh, India)

involved, deserve further consideration to ensure that the bedrock principles of international interaction are both preserved and seen to be preserved.

The idea of preventive action and the identification of the "root causes" of emergencies is, again, a minefield where one must tread carefully. Indeed, studying "root causes" in the humanitarian context appears irrelevant in some ways. If we were to hypothesize that a political upheaval led to a particular humanitarian crisis - refugees, let us say - what would better coordination in the United Nations have to do with the upheaval? That will doubtless be tackled by the United Nations political organs - the Security Council, for instance, if the upheaval threatens international peace and security. The United Nations humanitarian bodies would address the humanitarian crisis. To expect them, or their coordinating plexus, to address the political aspects would only be overburdening them, making their mandates controversial and unworkable: in a word, hamstringing them with extraneous responsibilities. We should therefore be very careful about what we are planning when we talk of making the United Nations humanitarian assistance machinery more efficient and then asserting that such efficiency can come from its political activism.

(Mr. Singh, India)

I referred earlier to the Organization's vast experience in the area we are discussing. Much is said these days about optimizing existing resources through better focus and coordination. Why not apply this precept to the resources of the United Nations system that address humanitarian crises? The United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) and the Disaster Relief Coordinator, the mechanism for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, and the various other bodies I mentioned earlier have the necessary mandate. If coordination is lacking, let us address that shortcoming instead of getting caught up in controversial new concepts that impinge on national sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction.

Funding is central to the empowerment and enhancement of the United Nations response. The Secretary-General's report and the Director-General's statement have both stressed this. The Secretary-General has recommended a revolving fund of $50 million and the Director-General has stressed that it is

> "essential for donor Governments to work closely with the United Nations system in order to adopt the necessary measures to provide the requisite financial support."

My delegation supports these ideas, in particular the specific proposal for a revolving fund set up through voluntary contributions that constitute additional resources. The additionality is of special importance because if the international community is to tackle the magnitude of the humanitarian crises occurring in various parts of the world, additional resources will have to be ploughed into the effort. Our eventual success or failure will depend upon the quality and content of our responses to the challenges we face today.

Mr. MARKER (Pakistan): Pakistan considers the question of humanitarian assistance to be an issue that merits the most serious consideration of the international community. The last decade has witnessed a series of incidents in which the United Nations has been called upon to provide urgent and extensive assistance to populations afflicted by man-made or natural disasters. My delegation would like to pay a tribute to the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization and its able Coordinator, Ambassador Essaafi, for the manner in which they have carried out the arduous tasks assigned to them. My own country, which continues to host the largest single refugee population in the world, can testify authoritatively and with gratitude to the importance of the United Nations role in providing emergency humanitarian relief.

The initiative on the part of the European Community designed to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations in this important field is indeed most timely. We believe that the importance of this issue warranted a conscious and comprehensive debate much earlier. We therefore welcome the presentation of concrete and tangible proposals by a number of countries with a view to enhancing the United Nations response to emergency situations.

My delegation is deeply appreciative of the Secretary-General's report of 17 October, which analyses in considerable detail the issue of humanitarian relief. The report offers us critical insights into the institutional mechanism currently deployed to discharge this important responsibility. It will no doubt provide a crucial input into our deliberations for developing a consensus on the United Nations role in this important area.

The delegation of Pakistan recalls with gratitude the role of the Permanent Representative of Sweden, Mr. Jan Eliasson, during the deliberations

(Mr. Marker, Pakistan)

of the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session, held in July this year. The summary presented by my good colleague from Sweden encapsulated with great professionalism the complexity of views expressed on this matter during the Council's summer session. The substance of his observations should considerably facilitate our task in developing a common position in regard to a comprehensive United Nations response to emergency situations.

It goes without saying that the response of the United Nations system to emergency situations needs to be strengthened. By definition, an emergency requires multiplicity of effort on the part of the various components of the United Nations system. It calls for immediate shelter, the meeting of health needs and food requirements, attention to vulnerable groups and long-term rehabilitation. No single agency today is in a position to meet all these needs.

On the basis of available evidence, most of the specialized agencies have responded to emergency needs with alacrity and diligence. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, these agencies have risen to the enormous challenges that they were called upon to address. In the case of Pakistan itself, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP) made sterling contributions to alleviate the hardships suffered by the 3 million Afghans who had sought refuge on our soil. We recognize and appreciate their valuable contributions in this regard.

However, I would be less than forthright if I were to disregard the possibility of registering concrete improvement in the operation of the United Nations in emergency situations. Let it not be forgotten that the most

(Mr. Marker, Pakistan)

critical phase of an emergency covers the first few days. According to expert opinion, more people die during this initial stage than in the subsequent periods. It is our understanding that the initiatives currently on the table are aimed at reducing the response period of the United Nations to an emergency situation to the very minimum. In that case, these initiatives can count on the full support of the delegation of Pakistan. The very definition of an emergency requires that the relief effort of the international community be forthcoming immediately and effectively. Delay in the provision of such assistance negates the very purpose for which it is intended.

Pakistan's support for building institutional strength for coping with such situations is conditional on some fundamental criteria, including the following:

First, no attempt should be made to compromise national sovereignty when providing emergency assistance. We agree with those who have categorically rejected the use of humanitarian relief as a guise for political intervention. It is my delegation's understanding that the proponents of strengthening the United Nations capacity do not entertain any such objectives. We therefore feel assured that the renewed international concern for people in distress is meant precisely to alleviate their suffering and does not go beyond this essential humanitarian consideration.

Secondly, preoccupation with humanitarian relief should not depart from the agreed agenda of the United Nations on the question of growth and development. There is a measure of legitimate concern that a more pronounced United Nations involvement in humanitarianism would detract from the world body's development agenda. It is necessary for us to ensure that the strengthening of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance

(Mr. Marker, Pakistan)

would not be at the expense of the mandated United Nations role in promoting the growth and development of the developing countries.

Thirdly, the provision of humanitarian relief would be inadequate and peripheral if it did not also create or supplement an indigenous capacity for dealing with emergency situations. The strengthening of the United Nations response to emergency needs should be accompanied by a comprehensive programme of technical cooperation aimed at enhancing the developing countries' abilities to cope with emergency situations.

(Mr. Marker, Pakistan)

Fourthly, history has shown that natural disasters have a way of wreaking greater devastation in countries with fragile economies than in more highly developed countries. It is therefore of the utmost importance that emergency relief should not end with the short term. Resettlement and rehabilitation should constitute inseparable components of the overall United Nations response to such situations. It would not be acceptable for the United Nations to dissociate itself from the plight of the stricken people after the provision of short-term relief.

Fifthly, the establishment of a revolving fund of $50 million, now under consideration, should be looked upon as the basis for a quick initial response by the United Nations to an emergency situation. It should be followed, depending on the severity of the situation, by bilateral assistance, as is now the case. The establishment of such a fund should not be seen as absolving the international community from providing bilateral assistance.

Later today, the Chairman of the Group of 77, Ambassador Awoonor of Ghana, will be presenting the comprehensive position of the Group of 77 on this question. My delegation will not, therefore, comment upon the technical and institutional aspects of the issue. We look forward to a comprehensive, open and frank exchange of views leading to a productive consensus on a matter to which we attach the highest importance.

Mr. GHEZAL (Tunisia) (interpretation from French): I should like first of all to thank the Secretary-General for his important report on the assessment of United Nations bodies' capacities and experience and of coordination measures in the field of humanitarian assistance.

(Mr. Ghezal, Tunisia)

The Ambassador of Ghana will speak later on behalf of the Group of 77 and put forward the views of the members of the Group, including my country. I should like at this point to make a few observations on behalf of my delegation.

The number of natural disasters and emergency situations has increased in recent years, outstripping the present capacity of relief organizations and resulting in enormous loss of human life and considerable material damage. It may thus be considered necessary to re-examine the operation, means and structure of emergency humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations system, with a view to improving coordination and increasing the system's capacity to respond effectively to emergency situations.

Tunisia attaches great importance to the question of emergency humanitarian assistance and has long been keenly interested in it. In 1971 my country had the privilege of presiding over the Economic and Social Council when it adopted the draft resolution adopted the same year by the General Assembly as resolution 2816 (XXVI), setting up the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO). Tunisia made an active contribution to the adoption of that resolution even though not all delegations were initially in favour of creating a focal point for disaster relief within the United Nations system.

In examining the question of emergency humanitarian assistance, my country is guided by the following principles:

First, there must be consensus on this important and complex question. Emergency humanitarian assistance necessarily involves the participation of several parties, including donor and recipient countries. Any attempt to

(Mr. Ghezal, Tunisia)

pressure one of those parties would be likely to reduce the effectiveness of the operation and run counter to its main objective of assisting the victims of disasters and relieving the privation and suffering of the stricken populations. Such a consensus, which prevailed during an era of international tension, should certainly continue during this new era of political détente and international cooperation.

Secondly, the main responsibility for disaster management rests with the Governments of the stricken countries. Humanitarian assistance, which must be considered an expression of the international community's solidarity with the countries suffering natural disasters, should in no case violate the principle of national sovereignty. Any reform in this field should, in our view, fully respect national sovereignty as embodied in the consent given or the request made by the country concerned.

Thirdly, the prevention of disasters is certainly the most effective means of alleviating their effects. It is therefore important to have the support of adequate early information machinery; human and material resources are also an essential factor in any assistance or prevention action.

Fourthly, since assistance and prevention operations involve action by several authorities at the same time and a number of interacting factors, coordination is an essential element of any emergency action if duplication and the waste of resources are to be avoided. This principle applies not only at the national level but also at the international level, where various programmes, agencies and organizations, both non-governmental and intergovernmental, are involved.

(Mr. Ghezal, Tunisia)

Lastly, the leadership of the United Nations system and of the Secretary-General is fundamental to ensuring the neutrality of the action undertaken and preserving its purely humanitarian nature.

A reading of various informal documents on the question of emergency humanitarian assistance shows that most of the elements proposed for a new coordinating structure are already present in the mandate of UNDRO, which was entrusted under General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI), with the system-wide coordination of all assistance in cases of disaster. Its relevance has been demonstrated, particularly in recent years, by various operations launched under extremely difficult conditions, including those during the Gulf crisis.

The duplication of mandates and institutions is certainly not likely to increase the efficiency of the action that we all wish to see undertaken; on the contrary, establishing a new bureaucracy would remove us even further from our objective of better coordination in this field.

In my delegation's view, the main problem confronting the United Nations system in the field of humanitarian assistance is the lack of financial resources. In that connection, the States Members of our Organization recognized in General Assembly resolution 36/225 that "a major constraint for the United Nations system to respond effectively to natural disasters and other disaster situations has been the shortage of resources".

(Mr. Ghezal, Tunisia)

It is not the intention of my delegation to say that coordination should not be improved and strengthened. On the contrary, better coordination is indispensable. However, it is important first of all to provide the system with the necessary financial resources for setting up an improved rapid-response apparatus within the United Nations and to ensure the strengthening of existing structures, as has been requested by General Assembly resolutions to that effect, the latest of which is resolution 45/221, adopted at the last session.

The establishment of a new structure for emergency humanitarian assistance within the United Nations deserves careful, thorough scrutiny. My delegation considers that such an idea should in any case be considered within the broader context of the possible reform and restructuring of the United Nations, in particular that of its Secretariat.

To conclude, I should like to join in the tribute paid by preceding speakers to all the men and women who, inspired by their faith in a most noble cause and often at great risk, serve as volunteers to save human lives and alleviate the suffering of unfortunate populations.

Mr. AMOONOR (Ghana): The very complex nature of the various proposals on the table on this important issue and the need to conduct, in our view, further discussions on some of the specific aspects of the proposals make it very difficult at this juncture for the Group of 77 to take what some may call a comprehensive and categorical position. On this score, however, during this debate we are open to listening to precise appraisals that might need to be made of existing institutions and some underlying considerations on this entire subject. Various delegations of our group have already given indications and made statements on this score.

(Mr. Awoonor, Ghana)

The informative and lucid report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/46/568 provides an important setting for our debate in this forum on the subject of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. I am sure at this session the General Assembly will take this report into serious consideration along with other proposals, both formal and informal, addressing this issue. Towards that same objective, the Group of 77 would like to share a few ideas and thoughts which it feels would help sharpen the focus on the subject.

At this point, we should like to thank the various delegations, including particularly that of Sweden, for their various formal and informal initiatives on this vital question. We refer in particular to the summary provided by Ambassador Eliasson of Sweden after the last session of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva.

The idea of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance has elicited the expression of many viewpoints. Some have proposed the establishment of a new office, that of a coordinator with the special responsibility to oversee the emergency operations of the United Nations system. There are other suggestions which call for some modifications in the present structure of emergency humanitarian assistance, including the establishment of a central fund.

The member countries of the Group of 77 welcome these important suggestions. They seem to have been in large part motivated by some of the shortcomings of recent humanitarian assistance efforts in the Gulf and perhaps also by long-standing dissatisfaction with the weaknesses of the present structures. The Group, however, would suggest the need for a very careful and critical analysis of these proposals. We would also advise an appraisal of

(Mr. Awoonor, Ghana)

these proposals within the context of earlier General Assembly resolutions on the subject.

Resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 contain important decisions which provide guidelines for coordinating humanitarian work. They make it clear that emergency humanitarian assistance within the United Nations system requires adequate resources in addition to human and technical capabilities for delivering this assistance. These two resolutions, it should be admitted, seem not to have fully ensured the smooth running or coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The ineffectualness of these resolutions for doing the work they were intended to do raises many questions other than simply that of the need to propose new resolutions. These questions have to do with the entire structure of the United Nations, within which this crucial assignment has to be carried out, and above all with certain persistent attitudes towards the suffering and the plight of poor people all over the globe. The issue is not the lack of a spirit of human solidarity. It goes deeper than that.

The Secretary-General's report refers to some of the shortcomings in the system when it mentions the need to improve coordination at the leadership and inter-agency levels. Certain situations of recent times might have brought these shortcomings out into the open. Nevertheless, we should not be in a hurry to fashion new structures only on the basis of essentially specific situations deriving from special circumstances. Whatever we may propose must, apart from its adaptive dynamism, envisage a broader perspective of human suffering and misery and project a larger framework for human development in all parts of the globe. Within this framework, not only sudden and dramatic catastrophes will rivet our attention, but also, more deeply, the grinding,

(Mr. Awoonor, Ghana)

relentless and tragically repetitive cycle of human misery engendered by acute poverty and exacerbated by natural disasters should engage our deepest compassion.

The moral obligation that the rich have to the poor perhaps defines, in the end, a deeply felt bond of our common humanity. It must go beyond sympathy and the spectacular show of immediate solidarity that suggests that next year or next decade we shall return with aeroplanes and trucks, rushing food and medicine to this or that drought-stricken population of skeletal human beings.

By all means, let us strengthen the structure of humanitarian assistance in order to make our response to disasters anywhere prompt and effective. To do this, let us provide adequate resources, let us bring the relevant agencies together, let us establish stocks, let us even consider the appointment of a coordinator. We in the Group of 77 shall certainly collaborate with all groups in crafting an adequate new structure that will be able to do away with the weaknesses of the old.

But the Group of 77 is slightly worried that some of us may not be sensitive to certain pleas for an abiding respect for the sovereignty of nations. Our concern stems from our historical past, when many of us, as colonial subjects, had no rights. The respect for sovereignty which the United Nations system enjoins is not an idle stipulation that can be rejected outright in the name of even the noblest gestures.

(Mr. Awoonor, Ghana)

And an essential attribute of that sovereignty is the principle of consent, one of the cornerstones in the democratic ideal itself. And to our Group, it involves partners, mediations and, in our global context, a fantastic convergence of the burning desire to help on this issue with a wonderful sense of relief in freely and willingly receiving that help. The United Nations cannot and must not be commandeered into forming an assistance brigade that will deliver its gifts by coercion. That would be definitely unacceptable to us.

The Group of 77 believes that the provision of resources for carrying out this relief assistance should be a paramount feature of the entire effort. The proposal to create a central fund therefore is a most laudable one.

By way of reiteration, let the United Nations develop, within this new proposition for humanitarian assistance coordination, the long-term perspective which once and for all addresses the vulnerability of developing countries. There is an important link between emergency assistance and development. The larger and bolder questions remain. Can we help this particular area to finally free itself from the cycle of floods that devastate it with regularity every year or decade? Can we not respond permanently to the water needs of this other area in order to ensure a permanent end to the drought that visits it like a biblical plague or the curse of some avenging god? Certain chronic conditions of underdevelopment cannot respond to periodic food drops alone nor can they be eliminated by the dramatic gestures of heroic and well-meaning assistance agents from afar. They can only respond to direct efforts that address the dismal root causes of that condition of underdevelopment.

(Mr. Awoonor, Ghana)

Finally, the ideas we have begun to examine on this item of the agenda are thought-provoking. But let us also examine in detail the institutional merits of the already existing mechanism to the full. Let us not jettison these useful organs we have so painfully, even if inadequately, created. The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) should remain pivotal to this effort, just as WHO, UNICEF, and the other agencies which are part of our collective endeavours in this direction. The United Nations itself should be in supreme charge, working through a well-knit inter-agency central bureau. It is only then that, if need be, a coordinator can emerge, centrally placed to utilize all available resources at his or her disposal, equipped with a long-term outlook on human misery, even as he or she remains at the ready to deliver succour to the afflicted at an hour's notice, in the sure knowledge that all disasters, like death, know neither rich nor poor, even though, by the very condition of their lives, it is the poor who are the first victims in the relentless war for human survival. The most lasting humanitarian assistance mechanism we can forge is when we collectively develop the will to eradicate global poverty in a world that can, if it has that will, clothe, feed and cure all our inhabitants.

Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the following Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM): Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country, Barbados.

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

Item 143, concerning the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, commands the close attention of the twelve Caribbean Community States since it impinges directly on the well-being of our people and our efforts to develop our small nation States.

Records dating back for centuries have shown that our region has been struck by a steady succession of disasters. This intervention will therefore highlight the need for an effective response to such emergency situations.

My task is made somewhat easier since I speak after the Chairman of the Group of 77, who has outlined the broad concerns of all developing countries as the Assembly debates this item and strives for consensus.

The issue of humanitarian assistance has progressively gained ground as a subject for attention by this body. This is both a matter for satisfaction and concern. It reflects the fact that the international community is responding in a positive way to the needs of mankind. Regrettably, however, it also reflects the fact that disasters, requiring the mobilization of humanitarian efforts, also seem to be occurring with increasing frequency and ferocity. Their toll, in lives lost, livelihoods ruined and property destroyed, is being felt increasingly by mankind.

The Member States of the Caribbean Community well understand the importance of an efficient system of humanitarian assistance. They are ecologically vulnerable and prone to a wide range of natural and man-made hazards including tropical storms and hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, drought, fires, and diseases which affect humans, plants and animals. Imprinted on the psyche of every generation of West Indians is the awareness of disasters which have resulted in loss of life, immeasurable

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

suffering and economic damage. These disasters have impeded the sustained economic growth of the countries immediately affected and indeed the whole region.

In 1979 the Caribbean subregion experienced several major disasters. There were volcanic eruptions in Saint Vincent in March of that year, floods in Jamaica in June and in Belize in August and the severe hurricanes, David and Frederick, which devastated Dominica and the Dominican Republic in September. In their wake regional governments asked the United Nations, through the Office of its Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), to help them establish appropriate mechanisms for disaster preparedness and response. In this context the Pan-Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Project (PCDPPP) came into being that same year.

During its existence, the Project served to raise awareness of the dangers posed by disasters and the importance of regional preparatory and prevention measures. It also served as an indispensable catalyst for the establishment of national offices for disaster preparedness and response in each Caribbean country. It received the support of a variety of extra-regional donors including the Governments of Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as the European Economic Community. We continue to be highly appreciative of this valuable support.

Such was the impact of the Project that, following its termination, member States of the Community recognized the need for its work to be continued and further developed. The catastrophic passage through the Caribbean region of hurricane Gilbert in 1988 and Hugo in 1989 graphically illustrated that need. At the eleventh CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting in

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

1990, therefore, agreement was reached on the establishment of an appropriate successor mechanism which has now formally come into being with the entry into force of an Inter-Governmental Agreement establishing the CARICOM Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). The Agency draws heavily on the practical experience gained by the Caribbean Governments through their efforts to mount coordinated emergency responses to hurricanes Gilbert and Hugo.

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

The States of the Caribbean Community continue to be beset by disasters. Last year, for example, Grenada was affected by a tragic fire which destroyed several vital Government buildings and other buildings of historical value. Only four days ago the Bahamas experienced a relentless pounding by ground swells, together with high tides causing unusual flooding. The resulting destruction of personal property and livelihood has been estimated at $100 million.

I have elaborated on the experience of CARICOM States with respect to disaster preparedness and prevention to highlight the priority that we place on measures to enhance our capacity to minimize the adverse effects of and to respond to disasters. We view investment in the disaster-management process as an investment in development intended to save lives, reduce human suffering and economic damage and minimize wastage from poorly coordinated disaster response and relief operations.

The Caribbean Community States are in sympathy with the humanitarian motives that have given rise to this debate. For who could reasonably dispute the need for an ongoing review of the capacity of the international community to respond quickly, effectively and in a coordinated manner to situations requiring humanitarian emergency assistance whenever they occur? The report of the Secretary-General (A/46/568) contains several useful proposals which deserve our fullest consideration.

The need for an emergency fund which can be drawn upon in the shortest possible time is evident. Access to such a fund should not be subject to unnecessary bureaucratic delays. The Caribbean Community States believe that given the past response of the international community in situations requiring

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

emergency humanitarian assistance, such a fund might well be established on a voluntary basis in the secure knowledge that it would be adequately subscribed.

We are convinced too that the establishment of a standing inter-agency committee with repesentatives from all concerned agencies would ensure that humanitarian relief is delivered in the most coordinated and cost-effective manner.

Once the standing committee is established and functioning, consolidated and comprehensive appeals for humanitarian assistance, encompassing the specific assessments of each agency, would be an almost natural by-product. Similarly, the speed and effectiveness of the response to humanitarian relief situations would be enhanced if a continuously updated inventory of human and material resources from a range of providers were to be readily available under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Caribbean Community States are convinced that careful consideration must be given to the measures necessary to ensure a more rapid and effective response to situations requiring humanitarian assistance.

Our decisions with respect to enhancing the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance must be based on a detailed analysis of the operation of the system now in existence. Such a dispassionate analysis should take into account existing mandates with respect to humanitarian relief, in particular General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI) of 1971 on the appointment of a Disaster Relief Coordinator, and subsequent resolutions calling for the strengthening of the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO). It should also reflect the views of the agencies involved regarding the ways in which their operations might be improved. Only in this way can we be sure

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

that we are undertaking a reshaping of the system that is indeed necessary to achieve the desired results.

Our efforts should be directed towards reaching consensus on an improved system of humanitarian assistance based on transparent and accountable management under the aegis of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Against this background we believe that any decision on the appointment of a humanitarian coordinator should reflect the conclusions reached after a full analysis of the operation of the existing system and should also take into account the discussions under way on the restructuring of the United Nations Secretariat.

The enhancement of the capacity of the international community to respond in situations needing humanitarian assistance requires that attention be given not only to the administrative dimension but also to the circumstances confronting those countries most likely to require such assistance.

Much of the impact of natural phenomena such as hurricanes and earthquakes, as well as man-made hazards, depends on the level of development of the areas affected. Development, or more correctly underdevelopment, is perhaps the greatest single factor reducing the capacities of countries to prepare for and respond to disaster situations. A fundamental prerequisite of any serious review of the response to humanitarian situations is therefore a renewal of efforts to eradicate the most pervasive aspects of underdevelopment, including human poverty, and the paucity of financial and technological resources, which predispose millions in the developing world to untimely death or to lives of suffering.

We are convinced that the effectiveness of international humanitarian assistance will be enhanced if efforts are intensified to improve the

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

capabilities of developing countries to respond to disasters of natural or man-made origin. Our experience in dealing with situations requiring humanitarian assistance has taught us several lessons which may be relevant to the circumstances confronting other developing countries.*

Among these lessons is the importance of enhancing the capacities of developing countries for damage- and need-assessment. In addition, the capacities of developing countries to coordinate international humanitarian efforts must be enhanced. Examples abound of instances where it was not so much that the international community did not respond but that it responded in a manner which was beyond the management capacity of the affected country, or which was inappropriate to the real emergency needs of the country.

Based on our experience Caribbean Community States are convinced, above all, that the most effective system for providing humanitarian assistance is one which is decentralized and relies on well-developed capacities in each region to achieve its objectives. The United Nations system must intensify its support for efforts to upgrade regional and subregional capacities in the developing world to deal with situations requiring humanitarian assistance. For in all disasters time is the greatest enemy and a centralized response capacity may not, in the final analysis, be as effective as a capacity developed at the regional level and based on an understanding of the institutional infrastructure as well as the social and cultural realities of the countries it serves.

As we proceed in our deliberations on this item we must be ever conscious of keeping as our guide the objective of alleviating the suffering of the

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* Mr. Min (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(Mr. Maycock, Barbados)

millions of people who, from year to year, need international humanitarian emergency assistance. In pursuit of this task we must accord the highest priority to the creation of the most efficient, cost-effective, transparent and democratic delivery system.

Ms. MILLBERG (New Zealand): New Zealand and its neighbours know well the havoc wrought by natural disasters - by tropical cyclones, for example, by floods and landslides, by earthquakes. In the fragile marine environment, in particular, of many of the smaller, low-lying States of the South Pacific, natural disasters cause damage and economic devastation disproportionate to the size of their populations. They set back by years the hopes and reasonable expectations of their people for economic progress and development. Despite the best that can be done, our region remains singularly vulnerable to the forces of nature.

The experience of the world is the experience of my own region writ large. All too often we witness the aftermath and effects of massive catastrophe, natural or man-made. The current scale of disaster relief and rehabilitation operations is unprecedented. Last year the Assembly adopted resolutions dealing with special economic and disaster relief assistance to some 20 disaster-prone or war-torn States and regions. The needs seem endless. There is occasional talk of compassion fatigue. The Secretary-General has noted that

> "Present conditions do not warrant any optimistic expectations regarding the occurrence, impact and complexity of humanitarian emergencies in the foreseeable future". (A/46/568, para. 1)

(Ms. Willberg, New Zealand)

The components that are essential to effective humanitarian assistance efforts have been explored comprehensively. A significant body of resource material is available. We pay tribute in particular to the reports of the United Nations system itself, including the Secretary-General's report (A/46/568). We note that, increasingly, importance is laid on the need to build disaster preparedness, management and rehabilitation capacity into overall planning for sustainable development. New Zealand shares this approach.

The issue we face in debate under this item now is not so much further examination of specific emergencies but rather to judge whether the components that go to make up a relief and rehabilitation operation are functioning as well as they should, or whether they can do better. So that it can respond to need as it would want to, the international community owes itself a review of the coordination and integration of the system it has fostered. The debate at the Economic and Social Council in July was particularly useful in setting the present process under way.

In his introduction last week of the Secretary-General's report on arrangements in the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance, the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation drew attention to three key areas needing urgent action to ensure effective responses to future emergencies. He spoke of funding, especially in the initial phase; standby capacities; and effective coordination of individual operational organizations for relief assistance, particularly for major, complex emergencies.

(Ms. Willberg, New Zealand)

These indeed go to the nub of the issue. There are several principal agencies and programmes responsible for prevention and mitigation efforts and for the provision of assistance in emergency situations. Specific aspects of emergencies and rehabilitation work may, however, fall to a variety of other agencies. These agencies also play a role in inter-agency needs assessment missions.

Other non-United Nations bodies - in particular, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Organization for Migration - have unique and important responsibilities. Other non-governmental organizations too have a major input to make. In consequence, any large-scale relief operation has to work within a complex web of separate, though in some cases overlapping, mandates, authorities, budgets and lines of communication. If time lost in clearing away the bureaucratic maze prolongs the suffering of the victims of disaster - and, unhappily, there is evidence that this has been so - our mechanisms for coordination and rapid response need overhauling.

Resolution of the most complex, lingering humanitarian emergencies entails responsiveness by the countries directly involved, and by the United Nations on behalf of the international community. Political judgements have to be made. The reality is that to deal with very complex situations in a timely way the Secretary-General has found it appropriate - advisedly - to establish ad hoc operations and to appoint a personal or special representative to exert the direct influence of his office in coordinating the responses of the affected countries and the international community. There has been a number of such appointees, and much is owed to their efforts.

(Ms. Millberg, New Zealand)

New Zealand has never been an advocate for adding layers to the bureaucracy. For all of us, the hallmark of the '90s is the effort to achieve a lean efficiency. Neither would we want to suggest any master plan that would subordinate in any way the mandates and the operational responsibilities of those agencies of the United Nations system that carry out relief and rehabilitation programmes in disaster-stricken areas. Each has its own proper budgetary competence. Each is responsible to the international community through its own governing body.

Nevertheless, the sum of the parts does not always add up to a coherent whole. The present coordination arrangements would, we believe, be greatly strengthened by the designation of a single, high-level coordinator responsible for emergency humanitarian assistance world wide, and, desirably, with no other competing responsibilities. If such an officer were delegated to the task under the personal authority of the Secretary-General, then dynamic, consistent and individual leadership from the top of the United Nations could be assured, together with the essentials of commitment and priority.

A primary focus, we believe, should be government-to-government dialogue in mobilizing donor support, in assessing the crisis in its overall context and in making the judgement calls to which I referred earlier. From this would logically flow the coordination of an integrated overall strategy, in cooperation with the operational agencies. In practical terms, this would be aided by setting up a permanent emergency standing committee of the offices in Geneva. Other functions would include the pooling and timely dissemination of information by drawing on existing systems, strengthened if necessary. They would also include the mobilization of expertise, of funds through a

(Ms. Willberg, New Zealand)

consolidated appeal, and of public opinion. A capacity for overview could conceivably provide an opportunity to study and make recommendations on the elimination of the root causes of complex humanitarian emergencies.

A cooperative liaison with other intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations would also be an important function. We have been pleased to note an early indication by the ICRC that it would wish to be associated, as an observer, with existing mechanisms for the coordination of humanitarian assistance or those that might be set up within the United Nations system, and is prepared to exchange information and define procedures for operational cooperation.

It seems to us that with functions involving both New York and Geneva, present structures would not need extensive modification to support a high-level coordinator. At the same time, we are conscious that the funding issue is crucial both to the system's capacity to respond immediately to humanitarian crisis and, of course, to implement the needs assessment follow-up. We intend to assess carefully the proposal for an emergency revolving fund, under the control of the coordinator, established on a voluntary basis, along with other measures to refine further and to make more accurate the emergency appeals process and ways of providing an assured funding base for emergency operations.

There is a consensus, we think, that the international community should do more, and do it better, for people in dire need through no fault of their own. It is axiomatic that the first resource and the first responsibility in times of humanitarian emergency must be the national one. Where the emergency is beyond the national resource for whatever reason, the international

(Ms. Willberg, New Zealand)

community will want to assist, for reasons of humanity. Mutual cooperation and confidence are then paramount considerations. In this, we believe an enhanced United Nations role is particularly important. We hope that the Assembly will be prepared to make a decision this year which will set the framework for the parts of the United Nations system, within their various mandates, to coordinate their responses as the Members of the United Nations want them to in situations of need.

Mr. MOORE (United States of America): One of the most vital roles the United Nations system plays is its response to humanitarian crises around the world, particularly demanding in the case of prolonged and complex emergencies with man-made as well as natural aspects. Our recent experience facing disasters such as those in Iraq, Bangladesh, the Horn of Africa and Liberia clearly demonstrates two truths: first, that heroic efforts are undertaken and magnificent results achieved by United Nations leadership, resources and organizations over and over again, virtually continuously, in response to disasters around the globe; secondly, that our record is not adequate: we must do better, with faster mobilization, greater cooperation and less fragmentation of effort and more reinforcing relationships among agencies, donors and Governments so that more lives are saved, more suffering is alleviated and more healing is begun. This is not a matter of placing blame for not having done better: it is a matter of being committed to doing better in the future. No one can stand up and say that there are no problems, that things are good enough as is.

Thus the United States shares the view articulated by many Governments, humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organizations and the Secretary-General that the response of the international community to disasters, natural or man-made, has become a major international concern. We believe that the United Nations and other international organizations must improve the coordination, efficiency and speed of their response to humanitarian emergencies. Such reform is urgently needed. Because of its pressing importance, my Government supports the main lines and the overall goals outlined in proposals before us, in particular the European Community's text and the Secretary-General's report. In regard to their call for a

(Mr. Moore, United States)

high-level coordinator, an emergency start-up fund and an emergency committee, we believe that the framework exists for a concerted international response that could provide early warning and preventative action as well as speedier and more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

It is our conviction that for such proposed reform and renewal of the United Nations humanitarian assistance activities to be effective it will have to be an integral part of the overall Secretariat reform that is critically needed. A coherent, unitary system is required for any of its components to function effectively. The designation and official establishment of a fund and the setting up of a committee, for instance, out of context institutionally, could not in themselves do the trick. The individual piece has to fit consistently into the whole of broader reform.

That being said, the United States looks forward to making detailed comments on the specifics of humanitarian assistance reform during the consultations which we hope will ensue shortly. We want to state at the outset, however, that we believe that the proposed revolving fund would be more effectively financed through voluntary than through assessed contributions. We firmly support the need for high-level coordination with immediate access to the Secretary-General. And we support the idea of a standing inter-agency emergency committee chaired by the official responsible for the coordination of emergency assistance. It is also our understanding that a strengthened United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) would play a central role in such a Committee's functioning and that the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), the League of Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Lion and Sun Societies (LICROSS) and the relevant private voluntary organizations would figure prominently in its work.

(Mr. Moore, United States)

We now face a major challenge and opportunity. A great deal of assessment and analysis has been undertaken. Informal discussions have taken place. Proposals have been developed. These issues are not new and our efforts to grapple with them stretch way back. We have made considerable progress and developed some momentum. Yet our work is only under way. There has not yet been enough dialogue, especially with the developing countries, and some serious issues of principle, design and implementation have been revealed. We look forward to considering and benefiting from the views of the Group of 77. But the question before us is: do we spend the time we have in using these remaining problems to frustrate our efforts and deny the challenge, or, by addressing and resolving them, do we seize the opportunity to achieve urgently needed progress?

Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) (interpretation from French): The inclusion in the agenda of this General Assembly session of the question of the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, and the controversial debates on this question at the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council are a reflection of a greater awareness by the international community of its duty of solidarity with the ever-growing number of victims of natural catastrophes and other emergency situations. None the less, it has regrettably been established that 90 per cent of the loss in human lives, material goods and economic infrastructures occur in developing countries.

It is an illusion to think that catastrophes and the resulting humanitarian situations can be dealt with in isolation from the economic and social development of the countries that are the victims. This is all the more true because media campaigns, while having the positive effect of

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

arousing international public opinion, very often take precedence over the rendering of truly effective assistance.

For example, man-made catastrophes are caused in part by outside factors connected with the inconsistencies of the international trade and financial system, which contribute to the degradation of the environment and the exhaustion of natural resources, as well as increasing food insecurity and the endemic spread of extreme poverty throughout the world.

In our view, the only way to solve the problem posed by emergency situations is to develop a country's national capacities to deal with its difficulties in all sovereignty - that is, to tackle matters such as poverty, structural adjustment programmes or humanitarian assistance in the context of the essential problem of the development of the developing countries.

That is why we again state that as close a relationship as possible must be established between humanitarian assistance, development objectives and the elimination of the disparities in the international economic environment, which inevitably weaken the ability of countries to deal with the catastrophes they have to face.

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

Could we have a better opportunity to reaffirm our devotion to the fundamental principle of the sovereignty of Member States? We believe that each Member State is, and will remain, primarily responsible for the measures and actions that have to be taken to deal with disasters in its own territory. We believe also that any international asisstance in this area must be subject to consent, following a request by a State, and must be compatible with needs and priorities. This consent and the appeal of the State concerned must be respected.

Here I should like to reaffirm that our country cannot go along with any undertaking designed to create autonomous machinery that, if not properly defined and strictly controlled, could result in interference in the internal affairs of States.

The setting up of a rapid-response mechanism taking into account information regarding natural disasters and information regarding political situations will be an important addition to the United Nations panopoly, bearing in mind, of course, fundamental respect for the principles of the Organization's Charter. Rapid-response machinery - some of which already exists - are designed to forecast and hence prevent natural disasters. In this respect, we welcome the activities being undertaken within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, and we appeal to the donor countries to make more generous voluntary contributions to the Decade Fund so that we may achieve the goals set out in resolution 44/236.

Let me now turn to the proposal that a high-level coordinator for emergency humanitarian assistance be appointed. We believe that functions of this type should be performed by the head of the Office of the United Nations

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

Disaster Relief Coordinator, whose mandate, established by resolution 2816 (XXVI), so far as profile and terms of reference are concerned, is fully adequate. If this option were retained, it would make it possible to safeguard the mandates and the authority of existing organizations, as well as the coordinating role assigned to the United Nations Disaster Relief Office by the General Assembly.

The effectiveness and authority of a high-level official would indeed be greater if the necessary financial, humanitarian and administrative means were made available to him. Furthermore, we believe that any decision in this area should not prejudice the role of the Secretary-General, who, when he deems it necessary, is authorized to make ad hoc arrangements, such as arrangements to appoint special representatives when, because of the coincidence of a number of complex disasters, the coordinator of humanitarian assistance is unable to deal effectively with the situation.

In any case, my delegation is prepared to contribute to the deliberations on this question, with a view to reaching agreement on arrangements that would make it possible for the United Nations system to provide a speedy, effective and coordinated response to appeals from afflicted countries. Let us not forget that, above and beyond projections and evaluations, the stakes are very high. We must do all that we can to ensure that thousands of human beings are helped - and at times even saved. This is one of the noble objectives that our Organization has been pursuing, and my country will spare no effort to ensure that this end is achieved and success secured.

Mr. WILENSKI (Australia): As is set out in the first Article of the Charter, one of the purposes for which the United Nations was founded was to

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

achieve cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character.

Undoubtedly, the United Nations has taken great strides in dealing with the challenges of all-too-frequent natural and man-made humanitarian emergencies. Arguably, however, dealing with these situations has become more difficult - certainly more complex - and there is now a pressing need to adjust the United Nations system to help it meet future challenges more effectively.

This is so for at least two reasons. First, the scale of emergencies continues to grow. If only because of rising population-growth rates in developing countries and greater economic and social interdependence, emergencies affect more people than ever before. In the last 20 years, it has been estimated, natural phenomena alone have killed about 3 million people throughout the world, and up to 1 billion people have probably been adversely affected by these disasters and have suffered devastating hardship, ill-health and severe economic loss. Secondly, from an institutional standpoint, United Nations operations to mitigate the effects of emergencies have become far more complex, diverse and sophisticated, and hence more difficult to steer.

As a result, the system has become increasingly prone to less-than-adequate coordination between agencies and to delays in responding to urgent events. It should be recognized, however, that this is not solely the result of inadequacies within the United Nations system and its component parts: Member States too need to review their performance in setting the goals and objectives and in providing funding for the Organization.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

Recently there have been instances of the response of the United Nations to humanitarian emergenies having been held up to international critical scrutiny. For example, even though, in the later stages, outstanding work was done by the United Nations system, in the early days and weeks after third-country nationals had begun to leave Iraq and Kuwait in large numbers in August and September last year, there was no organization or individual in a position to order overall priorities. Each United Nations organization prepared its own budget, and potential donors were invited to choose which area of the programme to support. In our view the initial international response to the plight of the Kurds would also have been more effective had there been a better mechanism for inter-agency coordination.

There was also concern at the slowness of the system to respond to a call, made earlier this year by many Member States, for an urgent meeting of United Nations organizations and concerned member Governments to address the worsening humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa.

We could not refer to that situation without expressing our praise of and our support for the work now being done, under trying circumstances, particularly by Under-Secretary-General Jonah's unit for African emergencies.

With these and other examples in mind, Australia joins other Member States in seeking a better coordinated and more timely and effective response by the United Nations system to humanitarian emergencies. This would not, of course, detract from the primary responsibility of the State concerned. By way of preface to some suggestions in this regard, I wish, first, to emphasize my delegation's general view that the United Nations organizations and the individuals working for them operate with commendable dedication and professionalism.

(Mr. Milenski, Australia)

As a firm supporter of multilateralism, we strongly endorse the call for the United Nations to assume a leadership role in the international response to emergencies. We are looking for better coordination between Governments, non-governmental organizations and international agencies of all kinds.

We also see a pressing need for a United Nations response to emergencies - a response that more fully integrates operational and political considerations in complex emergency situations, and improves the capacity of individual agencies, including the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, to perform more effectively. There is also an urgent need to ensure that the United Nations system deals properly with the plight of internally displaced persons, as, at present, these people are not directly covered by the mandate of any United Nations agency.

My delegation wishes to support a number of specific proposals, many of which have already been touched upon. In doing so, we should like to stress two points: first, that what is required is not one symbolic measure but an effective system, ranging from preventive measures and early warning to the link with reconstruction and development activities; secondly, that our criterion must be actually to improve operational effectiveness.

(Mr. Milenski, Australia)

Turning to the specific proposals, first, we believe that there should be a senior United Nations official responsible for the coordination of the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies. The position should not be an additional one, and its occupant should have direct access to the Secretary-General. However, the debate should not be over-concentrated on this issue.

Secondly, it is important that Geneva-based operations should be strengthened. While UNDRO should have no new responsibilities for the implementation or management of relief operations, it should be improved in its role as a clearing-house of information and of disaster prevention and mitigation work.

UNDRO should also be given an expanded role servicing the Organization's coordination machinery. In that regard, it should maintain a catalogue of national, United Nations and non-governmental-organization capacities which could be called up, as appropriate, in response to emergency situations. Also, UNDRO's mandate needs to be clarified, so that it will be better understood that UNDRO has a major role to play in both natural and human-made emergencies.

Thirdly, a standing inter-agency committee should be established and should meet regularly at Geneva. Its work would involve both the United Nations and other agencies. Such a committee would meet automatically in response to any major humanitarian emergency.

Next, an emergency group should be established at Geneva for each major emergency. That group would include the countries affected and potential donors, as well as members of the standing inter-agency committee.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

Lastly, there should be a central emergency fund, fed by voluntary contributions. The practice of issuing consolidated appeals should continue. The existence of the fund not only would facilitate a much more immediate response but should itself assist coordination.

Before concluding, we think it is important to address concerns about the possibility that greater emphasis on humanitarian assistance will mean less emphasis on economic development. We prefer to view those two activities as closely intertwined. As the representative of Ghana, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, has eloquently pointed out, development activities are a necessary prerequisite to placing countries in a position to withstand emergencies and to emerge from them in a reasonable position. In our view, there must be greater recognition that both longer-term development, and emergency activities contribute to assisting developing countries which have suffered disasters. Indeed, we see a need to integrate more closely an understanding of the effects of disasters and massive movements of people on development and the role that development may play in preventing or mitigating such humanitarian problems.

In this regard, we place particular importance on the roles of those United Nations agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which not only assist States that have suffered from disasters but also provide technical assistance and policy advice leading to the strengthening of national capacities.

Australia is confident that the General Assembly at this session will set up the framework for a strengthened United Nations response to humanitarian

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

emergencies. We cannot fail to take this opportunity to improve the system: we must do our utmost, so that more lives can be saved through concerted international action.

Mr. KHARRAZI (Islamic Republic of Iran): Following the various recent crises in the world, especially the Persian Gulf crisis, the capacity of current international emergency assistance systems to respond to natural and man-made disasters has been called into question. Although the idea of improving United Nations emergency arrangements is not new, the increasing importance of the issue demands new thoughts on how to reinforce the Organization's coordinating role in such situations. In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran, while applauding the efforts undertaken so far by the United Nations emergency system, believes that there is still room for more improvement. In other words, we seriously need to discuss how to make the current system more responsive, coherent, timely and effective.

Being prone to natural disasters, my country has recently experienced many calamities, including in 1990 one of the most devastating earthquakes in its history, which left more than 35,000 dead and 500,000 people homeless. Furthermore, the recent turmoil in Iraq triggered a large influx of refugees. In just a couple of days, more than 1 million Iraqi refugees crossed the borders into Iran and seriously encumbered the country with an extraordinary and unprecedented emergency situation. The needs of the affected people in those two incidents went far beyond the capabilities of the Government, and international assistance became absolutely necessary. Drawing upon the aforementioned experiences and motivated by its keen interest in improving the United Nations emergency system, my delegation would like to elaborate on the

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

deliberations of the General Assembly with regard to the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance. Since there is a variety of proposals and non-papers which expound the positions of a number of regional groups and individual countries, I shall try to address the main ideas and leave the details to informal discussions concerning a possible draft resolution on the subject.

In this context, there are a number of central issues which must be addressed.

First, the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches great importance to the improvement of the United Nations emergency system through the promotion of coordination. Therefore, during the debate at the second 1991 session of the Economic and Social Council and the current discussion, our delegation has followed the issue closely.

Second, we believe that most of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI) on assistance in case of natural disasters and other disaster situations are still useful.

Third, the purpose of humanitarian assistance is to provide stricken countries with effective contributions in order to minimize human suffering and to pave the way for rapid economic and social rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected areas. Accordingly, in our deliberations on this issue, we have to take note of the fact that the implementation of reform in the humanitarian-assistance system should not by any means jeopardize respect for the national sovereignty of recipient States.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Fourth, one of the main difficulties of current humanitarian-emergency arrangements is the issue of financial resources. Raising contributions takes time, and the amount raised sometimes is not commensurate with the actual needs of the affected areas. In order to overcome this difficulty, and to ensure the ability of the system to respond adequately to the needs of the disaster-stricken countries, additional financial resources should be provided by the donor countries.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Fifth, emergency humanitarian assistance, as the term implies, is aimed at the immediate alleviation of human suffering. Unfortunately, the quality of such aid has often been diluted by sheer politics. In some cases, a number of donor countries have withheld their assistance from a recipient because of its political preferences. We must therefore ensure that humanitarian assistance will not be influenced by political interests. It is of great importance that the system should be immune to politicization.

Sixth, it frequently happens that a few days after the occurrence of a disaster, the emergency situation becomes less immediate. Survivors are found and resettled temporarily, and such actions are often wrongly viewed as the end of the emergency, when in fact the most important tasks still lie ahead. The restoration of basic services, including sanitary water supply, food, schools and health care, calls for more resources. In some cases, the human suffering continues beyond the relief process. Accordingly, international support must be so structured as to expedite the process of rehabilitation and must be continued until reconstruction of the affected areas.

Seventh, although coordination of the system is of the utmost importance, it must not, by any means, be achieved at the expense of the efficiency of the emergency response system.

Eighth, in deference to the long-standing experience of the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), the UNDRO secretariat should be the main foundation of the emergency system.

Ninth, early warning systems and prevention mechanisms provide countries likely to suffer natural disasters with an opportunity to take appropriate preparedness and preventive measures in order to limit the extent of damage.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Accordingly, due attention should be given to strengthening the institutional capacities of disaster-prone countries in the areas of disaster management. In addition, with a view to ensuring the greatest possible success of early warning systems and prevention mechanisms, access of those countries to relevant information must be facilitated.

Tenth, the appointment of Mr. Essafi as the coordinator for assistance to the victims of the earthquake in Iran, Mrs. Ogata as the coordinator for rendering assistance to the Iraqi refugees and displaced persons, Mr. Savon as the coordinator for Operation Salam and, in particular, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan as the executive coordinator for rendering humanitarian assistance to the affected people during the Persian Gulf conflict has yielded positive results in the coordination of activities at the international and national levels. At the same time, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the idea of strengthening the coordination and efficiency of emergency assistance through the appointment of a high-level coordinator needs to be discussed carefully. In other words, the process of reforming the emergency relief system does not necessarily translate into a change in the leadership of the emergency system. In many previous cases, the problem has stemmed from the lack of adequate resources available to the agencies concerned.

Moreover, since any reform is time-consuming and resource-consuming, any suggestion regarding the appointment of a high-level coordinator should be in line with a possible reform of the United Nations Secretariat.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Eleventh, some of the shortcomings of the current system could be ascribed to the lack of sufficient coordination at two levels - among the relief agencies themselves and between relief agencies and donors. In order to address that important issue, our discussion should also focus on cooperation and coordination at both these levels. Mindful of the necessity of such coordination, the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly believes that the idea of an emergency standing committee deserves serious consideration. That committee, while making it possible to avoid duplication and overlap through the division of labour and responsibilities, could expedite the response of the United Nations emergency system to affected countries.

Twelfth, as I noted earlier, one of the major problems of emergency assistance relates to the availability of resources. When a disaster occurs, there is a need for large amounts of material and financial resources in a short time. The current process of launching an appeal does not meet the actual needs of disaster-stricken countries. In that regard, the proposal to establish an emergency revolving fund has my delegation's support. The important point is that the fund should be established on the basis of one-time contributions from the donors. Once some of the resources have been utilized, agencies will replenish them through a consolidated appeal.

Moreover, no one can predict how many disasters may occur in a year. Thus, the first-time voluntary contributions to the fund must be made in such a way as to ensure the financial ability of the emergency assistance system to respond effectively to the requirements of the needy countries during the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction process.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Thirteenth, the assistance rendered should conform to the needs of the victims of the calamity. The important factors of cultural and regional differences that define their needs should be taken into account.

Furthermore, the process of requesting relief assistance needs to be unburdened by bureaucracy. The system must have at its disposal all the necessary resources to be utilized at the discretion of the heads of agencies.

Fourteenth, a part of the current problem relates to coordination and cooperation among United Nations agencies in the field. The responsibilities of the UNDRO Coordinator and of the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme should be more clearly delineated.

In conclusion, I should like to reaffirm that the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly supports the concept of the improvement of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance and stands ready, on the basis of its experience, to participate in the discussion on that issue. It is my sincere hope that Members can work out pragmatic and constructive proposals which will enable the system to respond to the emergency needs of affected areas in a more coherent, timely and effective way.

Mr. LICHEM (Austria): The item before us today, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations", is timely and important. Major humanitarian emergencies are likely to become more frequent in the future; population growth, ever more intensive use of land resources in disaster-prone areas and man's inhumanity to man are but a few of the reasons. In today's complex disaster situations the traditional distinction between natural and man-made disasters is no longer helpful.

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

The primary responsibility for addressing disasters clearly lies with the affected country. Each Government has the obligation to care for its people and to ensure access to all those in need of assistance. Often, however, disasters cannot be coped with effectively by the affected country alone. In that case the very suffering of the disaster victims makes a claim on humanity.

Since the need for international solidarity in abating the effects of disasters is likely to grow even more in the future it is only fitting that - at a time when we are engaging in considerations of how to make the United Nations system more responsive to the new challenges - humanitarian solidarity should be in the forefront of institutional innovation.

Humanitarian assistance in emergency situations has always been a major responsibility of the United Nations. The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), in particular, has striven valiantly to fulfil a broad mandate with very limited resources.

Austria actively participated in the pertinent deliberations during the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva earlier this year, which were so ably reflected in the summary by Vice-President Ambassador Eliasson. Since then many delegations have given thought to how the United Nations response system can be strengthened. We feel that we should at this point concentrate on the practical level and attempt to agree on a workable organizational set-up for a better emergency response within the framework of the provisions of the Charter. We can build upon the foundation laid by last year's General Assembly resolution 45/100.

Austria has taken note with interest of the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the capacity, experience and coordination

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

arrangements in the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance. We also feel that a number of countries have put forward very valuable ideas.

Austria supports the concept of a high-level official with direct access to the Secretary-General. It will be important, if the position of such a high-level official should indeed be created, to provide this official with the tools he or she needs in order really to make a difference. We should like to highlight five such tools: structures of coordination; early warning and needs assessment; public information; funding; and standby capacity.

I begin with coordination. The high-level official will have to be put in a position from which he or she can effectively coordinate the activities of the international community. In our opinion, this would call for a strengthening of the existing infrastructure, as represented by the UNDRO secretariat. In addition, two further measures should be considered.

The first is creation of a standing inter-agency committee assuring the participation of all agencies and organizations of the United Nations involved in relief assistance, with a standing invitation to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration. Specific non-governmental organizations should be invited to participate in the meeting of the inter-agency committee, as appropriate, as should representatives of the country or countries affected by the emergency.

Secondly, there will need to be a system of staff secondments to the office of the high-level official from the main agencies concerned in order to assure effective coordination and cooperation on a day-to-day basis, in particular, in handling, standardizing and transforming relevant information on a systematic routine basis. Similarly, it may prove useful also to allow

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

national staff temporarily to join the office of the high-level official on secondment. Effective coordination in the field should also be highlighted.

With regard to early warning and needs assessment, it will be very important for the high-level official to have speedy access to high-quality information on impending or current disasters causing or likely to cause human emergencies requiring humanitarian assistance. There are currently a number of channels in the United Nations system in which information suitable for early warning is collected and analysed. It will be important to network these data systems and assure their processing and analysis at an appropriate focal point. All relevant data from international and national sources should be available, together with recommendations for action to the high-level official, where appropriate.

I turn to public information. The high-level official should also serve as a focal point in cooperating with the media on humanitarian emergency assistance operations and ensure that the general public is adequately informed. Cooperating closely with the media should assure the necessary public interest and support for major operations.

Standby capacity is another important issue. The United Nations needs to be in a position to call upon adequate staff and material resources available at the international and national levels on short notice.

In order to assure smooth cooperation between a country that is the victim of a major disaster and international emergency assistance, a number of issues, including administrative procedures and cooperation with other countries, should be standardized and where possible agreed upon in principle in advance. There are also certain legal issues to be settled with regard to the status of personnel, the importation of assistance equipment and so on.

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

Austria is currently reviewing its national standby capacity. In this connection, we are also studying the deployment of Austrian disaster experts in support of internationally coordinated relief operations for emergencies requiring a humanitarian response.

Finally, there is the question of funding. We welcome the idea of a central emergency fund to be established through the provision of new and additional resources. This fund would be used for the immediate financing of the crucial initial response phase. Connected with the idea of the central emergency fund is the proposal to have only one consolidated appeal. We believe that a consolidated appeal could indeed greatly reduce the confusion often created in the donor community by competing and overlapping appeals of individual agencies.

Austria hopes that the General Assembly at this session will be able to agree upon measures that will enhance the United Nations capacity in the field of humanitarian emergency assistance. We look forward to participating actively in transparent and open-ended deliberations that should take into account the interests of Member States.

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

We should remember, however, that response is only one element in the broader context of disaster management. Early warning, prevention, preparedness, mitigation, recovery and rehabilitation are equally essential. In all those areas the role of the United Nations system must be strengthened. This need for reinforcement should also be brought to the attention of the governing bodies of the various United Nations agencies. Special emphasis should be placed on the needs of developing countries.

We all know that disasters can never be totally prevented. However, their effects in terms of destruction, loss of human life and human suffering can be considerably abated. International peace and the sustainable development and use of the world's endowment of resources are fundamental to our progress towards that goal.

Mr. PADILLA (Philippines): Disaster situations requiring humanitarian assistance, be they natural or man-made, can be viewed from three points of reference: before, during and after their occurrence.

Many natural disasters defy prediction; the numerous tremors that shake the earth every day come to mind. Some are predictable: a typhoon's fury can, for instance, be estimated before it strikes land. Most man-made disasters - wars, droughts and famines resulting from environmental degradation, industrial accidents due to long-standing negligence - need not escape the foreknowledge of the prudent.

Whether predictable or unforeseen, most disasters can be anticipated and prepared for. Some - particularly those which are man-made - could indeed be avoided.

The what and when and how of minimizing the ill effects of disaster are no mystery to those who are ready, that is, who possess the technology and

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

resources for minimizing disasters and mitigating catastrophes. Sadly, however, many disaster-prone developing countries lack such resources; many do not possess the capacity or technical means for coping adequately with complicated emergency situations.

Any disaster requires that certain imperatives should be met: immediate relief for those affected; prompt assessment of damage and needs; coordination of aid, both domestic and foreign, bilateral and multilateral, governmental and non-governmental; and logistical support for the deployment and distribution of materials and personnel. Preparedness is a primary requisite for meeting those imperatives.

But it is usually the aftermath of disasters that presents the most difficulties. The numbness after the initial impact gives way to pain, followed in turn by a sense of loss and a profound puzzlement regarding what to do next. Life must go on despite injuries sustained. Communities and nations must pursue growth and development despite setbacks equivalent to years of effort, despite the loss of resources that had taken years to generate and conserve.

The founding fathers of the United Nations recognized the importance of humanitarian concerns. Among the purposes of our Organization, as specified in its Charter, is that of achieving "international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character". It is in that spirit that we are pooling our efforts during the current International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and are now discussing ways of improving the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance.

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

In this regard, my delegation would like to recommend in-depth consideration by this Assembly of the following areas:

First, the prevention of natural disasters, as well as socio-political and economic situations that pose threats to life, property and peace;

Secondly, preparedness for such disasters and emergency situations;

Thirdly, emergency management, including early-warning mechanisms, assessment of damage and immediate needs, types and sources of aid and relief, coordination of donors and distribution of aid and personnel;

Fourthly, rehabilitation and resettlement of victims, with attention to the restoration of their morale;

Fifthly, continued economic and social development of afflicted communities and nations;

Sixthly, optimization of the United Nations role of cooperation, coordination and leadership in all of these critical areas.

Prevention of natural disasters and preparedness for them require us to turn to more specialized bodies, including United Nations agencies such as the Centre for Science and Technology, the Committee on Natural Resources and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Since the roots of such disasters can be traced to poverty, and since prevention and preparedness are to a large extent linked to the afflicted nations' level of development, we could also refer to the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

Emergency management and rehabilitation are important concerns of UNDRO, with the help in certain cases of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNDP.

Post-disaster development, a vital undertaking, requires the concerted efforts of UNDP, FAO and other development agencies, and indeed of the entire United Nations system. Since the United Nations could thus play important roles in all three areas of concern, it behooves us to consider appropriate ways of coordinating and integrating activities, in order to achieve the greatest effectiveness within the least possible time and with optimal utilization of available resources.

At this juncture, my delegation wishes to express its profound appreciation for United Nations efforts and for the contributions of numerous States Members of the Organization that came to the aid of the Philippines during recent disasters, including a deadly earthquake and the calamitous eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Last week, even as the volcano continued to rumble, threatening further destruction, a typhoon caused turmoil in our land; many people were reported dead, injured or missing. Early estimates of damage to agriculture and to our Nation's infrastructure amount to billions of pesos.

In the wake of all those catastrophes, United Nations agencies - UNDRO, UNDP, UNICEF, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), te World Food Programme (WFP), FAO, UNHCR and IOM - sent cash and aid in kind to the Philippines. At the same time, nations of all continents dispatched concrete, tangible and meaningful assistance.

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

To all of them, the Filipino people will always be grateful.

But let me return to the basic theme of this discussion.

Granted, the United Nations system did well in coming to the aid of my country and other countries in the wake of disasters. But could the system have done better? Could the assessment of a disaster's gravity - in terms of injury to, or loss of, life and property - and the assessment of the kind of aid needed from each agency and programme be accomplished faster?

Should the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) resident representative, doubling as representative of the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), continue to act ex officio as coordinator for all relief coming from the United Nations system; or should there be an overall coordinator, assisted by a specific project officer, located in New York, Geneva or elsewhere, who could assume responsibility for an integrated United Nations response?

Should donor countries contribute to a larger disaster fund administered by the United Nations Secretary-General through a coordinator accountable to him, so that United Nations relief could automatically come from this fund, without prejudice to each donor country's decision to send more funds to the afflicted country if it deemed that the situation warranted new and additional funding?

I ask all those questions so that disaster-management and humanitarian-assistance experts can consider them and determine if improvements are needed in the United Nations modus operandi.

But the most important element that we must consider is the imperative to pursue rehabilitation and develpment programmes after the emergency. In the

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

case of our Pinatubo disaster, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization devised projects for agricultural development soon after the disaster. UNDP earmarked half a million dollars for development efforts, contingent on a project study from our Government, which has already been submitted.

In conclusion, we submit that with the resolve of developing countries to help themselves in the wake of disasters, the international community could, with due respect for the sovereignty and sensibilities of the affected countries, pursue a more determined and coordinated assistance effort.

Mr. RAZALI (Malaysia): The Malaysian delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the review of the capacity, experience and coordination arrangements of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance.

Today there is a growing consensus that relief of the intolerable suffering caused by disasters is one of the major items on the international agenda. The world has witnessed spectacles of displacement, devastation and death caused by frequent disasters, some natural and others entirely man-made, around the globe. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in natural and man-made disasters requiring United Nations relief operations - in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, Central America, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Jordan, among other places. Yet in many cases the United Nations has not been able to respond quickly enough and many weaknesses have surfaced in handling crisis situations.

To ensure that the United Nations will provide leadership to the international community for swift and effective response to emergencies, which

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

in recent years have been complex in nature and protracted in duration, there is now an urgent need to examine the existing structures and capacities of the United Nations agencies involved: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

My delegation shares the view of the Secretary-General that any operational activity to be undertaken by the United Nations on humanitarian assistance has to be sure of ready and sufficient resources. The mechanism or system, no matter how well designed, will be of little use and cannot be put in place if there is a lack of necessary resources. In this regard, the establishment of a United Nations central emergency revolving fund, as proposed by the Secretary-General, merits serious consideration.

My delegation further shares the view of the Secretary-General that the fund should be primarily a cash-flow mechanism to enable the organizations of the system to respond effectively in the initial phases of an emergency and should therefore not be seen as a substitute for voluntary contributions by the donor community. It is critically important that the United Nations system be able to respond rapidly during the initial stages of emergencies, because most human suffering and loss of life occur during these stages.

At the same time, my delegation wishes to stress the importance of ensuring the flow of funds to sustain humanitarian relief operations beyond the initial phases. In cases where there is a pattern of recurrent natural

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

disasters, such as floods and famine in southern countries, the United Nations should also consider providing necessary technical and developmental assistance to minimize or even remove the underlying causes. The Chairman of the Group of 77 made it clear just now that at the heart of it all lies the necessity of enhancing development, and no amount of humanitarian relief will meet that single necessity.

In general, my delegation agrees with the recommendations made by the Secretary-General, as contained in his report (A/46/568), which stress among other things the need to strengthen and review the early warning system, procedures and recruitment of staff, pre-positioning of stockpiles of relief supplies and logistical support, and consolidated appeals. With regard to the proposal to review, coordinate and strengthen the early warning system operated in the United Nations system, my delegation believes that this effort deserves all-round support. To ensure the usefulness of this warning system, it must consist of three main components: identifying the danger as early as possible; communicating the nature of the danger coherently and effectively; and, particularly in those countries affected by recurrent natural disasters, establishing national task forces with clear and effective communication links to United Nations relief agencies.

New ideas and proposals are being put forward from different quarters with regard to the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance. The Nordic countries and the European Economic Community have made specific proposals that obviously merit proper consideration. It is my delegation's view that we should pursue the necessary reform and changes with

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

an open mind, not from any pre-fixed position. There should be a free exchange of views among all interested parties in order to work towards achieving the best practical solution. The Malaysian delegation will actively participate in this discussion.

In deliberating the question of having effective coordination and appointing of a senior coordinator, delegations should not use the Gulf crisis as a reference point, as it is not the kind of experience that could be used to provide a model for general application.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

The search for the best practical solution should not be clouded by a contest of ideas and approaches amongst the donor countries with the rest of us looking on. Moreover, the rights of States, a principle that must always be maintained, must not become a point of controversy in the reform process. Neither must there exist grey areas of political interpretation of what constitutes an emergency situation.

There is already a growing consensus that for better coordination and effectiveness there is an urgent need for the establishment of a standing committee in Geneva made up of all United Nations relief bodies. Like many others, the Malaysian delegation also recognizes the importance of having effective leadership in coordinating United Nations relief operations. We are not, therefore, necessarily opposed to the idea of having a senior coordinator directly responsible to the Secretary-General for this purpose, but there should also be a parallel exercise to underline and streamline the mandates and actual running of the various United Nations relief bodies. Malaysia would firmly resist the Office of the Coordinator, if decided upon, becoming a casualty to the pulls and counter-pulls of contesting interests.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.